

**MICHIGAN AGRICULTURAL
TOURISM ADVISORY COMMISSION**
Constitution Hall
Van Dusen Room
525 W. Allegan
Lansing, MI 48933

MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, October 19, 2005

PRESENT:

Mitch Irwin, Director, Michigan Department of Agriculture
Ann Jousma-Miller, Michigan Commission of Agriculture
Walter Brys, Brys Estate Vineyards
Herb Teichman, Tree-mendus Fruit Farm
Jim Graham, Farmland Pheasant Hunters, Inc.
Abbey Jacobson, Westview Orchards
Greg McKenzie, Lima Township Board of Trustees
Carl Osentoski, Huron County Economic Development Corporation
Melinda Remer, Travel Michigan
Vickie Micheau, Delta County Chamber of Commerce

OTHERS PRESENT:

Bridget Medina, Michigan Department of Agriculture
Jeanne Lipe, Michigan Department of Agriculture
Linda Jones, Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council / MDA
Liana Bennett, Michigan Department of Agriculture
Karel Bush, Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council
Eileen Brys, Brys Estate Vineyards

INTRODUCTIONS

Mitch Irwin called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm with a welcome and introduction to the Michigan Agricultural Tourism Advisory Commission. Each member and others present in the room, introduced themselves, gave a brief history of his/her involvement in agriculture and their interest area with regards to agricultural tourism.

COMMISSION PURPOSE AND TIMELINES

Jeanne Lipe, Linda Jones and Liana Bennett are key staff contacts within the Michigan Department of Agriculture to assist Commission members with their charge.

The legislation states that the Commission has the mission to review the areas of zoning, signage, promotion and other issues relating to agricultural tourism in Michigan.

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Approved January 10, 2006
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Jeanne Lipe gave a brief review of the organization of the Commission. This recommendation is attached. The only discussion pertaining to the recommendations was to replace the temporary chair, Mitch Irwin, and elect a new chair from the Commission, as per the legislation.

The Commission will present a report to the Legislature by March 2006 to incorporate any budgetary needs for any recommendations listed in the proposal. Studies and activities will continue during the second year with a final report in January 2007. If there are activities that are agreed upon and can be implemented, these will be done so before the timeline expires.

KEY ISSUES IN AGRICULTURAL TOURISM

Throughout the meeting several issues in agricultural tourism were identified. These were:

- ?? Identify and inventory agricultural tourism businesses; rank them by various inputs
- ?? State Branding
- ?? Compile a central list of existing agricultural tourism businesses; Melinda Remer will send staff a database of ag tourism businesses listed in the Travel Michigan database. This will be added to the U -Pick Directory database to result in a main ag tourism listing.
- ?? When and where to promote and advertise
- ?? Rural areas need more signage to direct travelers

GATHERING INDUSTRY INPUT

Listening sessions will be conducted by staff at various events. These will be held in conjunction with other set agricultural meetings. The first of these will be done at the Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo in December.

Linda Jones suggested to send a letter to Visitor and Convention Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce and commodity groups to gather input.

Melinda Remer suggested setting up Familiarization (Fam) Trips in various areas.

Mitch Irwin suggested revising US Census data from National Statistics Service, in particular the Michigan Statistics Service (MAS) to include agricultural tourism.

Staff will compile existing county profiles with regards to general farming and travel.

Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo

The Commission is encouraged to attend the Expo to be held December 6-8 in Grand Rapids. Registration forms were handed out during the meeting. Further information can be found at www.glexpo.com.

Other Groups

There are three main groups that are working in parallel to this Commission. The first is a Michigan State University group, led by Patrick O'Connor. This group is focused on creating a state-wide Agricultural Tourism Association. The second is a Farm Bureau Advisory Committee that will report to its Board of Directors. The third is an Ag Council created with Farm Bureau and a handful of commodity groups that emphasizes ag in the classroom, agricultural tourism and general agricultural education.

Subcommittee Issues

Zoning – The main issue to research is the township regulations to revise and include agricultural tourism businesses.

Signage – The signage subcommittee will look into Township, County, State, Federal regulations, tourism signs, pictorial and uniform signs, MDOT road routes and signing zoning laws.

Promotion – This subcommittee will look into ways to create awareness for and promote agricultural tourism businesses. This is through printed booklets vs. websites, partnerships, Travel Info Centers, State Map icons, Internary Pads, Regional booklets.

Other Issues – There are other existing groups and resources that need to be utilized more effectively. Other issues include liability issues, other State best practices, branding, regional packages, U-Pick Directory and government health codes and others.

SUBCOMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Three subcommittees were created: Zoning Issues and Opportunities, Signage Issues and Opportunities and Awareness and Promotion Issues and Opportunities. The Commission members divided themselves as follows:

Zoning Issues and Opportunities Subcommittee

Chairperson: Abbey Jacobson

Members: Greg McKenzie
Vickie Micheau

Staff: Liana Bennett

Signage Issues and Opportunities Subcommittee

Chairperson: Walter Brys

Members: Carl Ostenoski
Vickie Micheau
Herb Teichman

Staff: Linda Jones

Awareness and Promotion Issues and Opportunities Subcommittee

Chairperson: Melinda Remer

Members: Jim Graham
Vickie Micheau

Staff: Jeanne Lipe

Election of Chair

It was moved by Melinda Remer and supported by Vickie Micheau that Ann Jousma-Miller be elected chairperson per the statute. Motion carried unanimously.

CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENTS

Focus needs to be on those items we can change – not trades or tariffs; high production costs; focus needs to be on immediate results, immediate results help us to move forward

Implement at local level

Develop consumer loyalty – helping them to become more food selective

Capitalize on this through HS and foreign disease

Use until you can temporary signage

Variances are negotiable

NEXT MEETING DATES

There was a proposal for meeting dates to be arranged the beginning of January, March and June. It was suggested that these meetings coincide with other related agricultural events, in particular any agricultural tourism events. A list of events will be compiled by the Commission staff who will present suggested dates to the Commission.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 pm by Mitch Irwin.